[p. 1]

SUMMARY

On the assumption that a woman's physical and mental condition at childbirth is a product of her life-long daily habits and ideas as well as any particular injunctions set up to insure well-being in pregnancy and parturition, the cultural scene was searched to ascertain all possible relevancies.

The farmers of Bang Chan lived in a tropical, rice-growing terrain, annually flooded by the monsoon run-off. Food was plentiful even if cash was not. Except for better housing and equipment, and a greater enjoyment of market novelties, the rich lived much like the poor. The work in the fields by women paralleled that by men. Sharp physical demands, especially at planting and harvest, made them muscular.

At marriage the partners were fully mature and no woman was married against her wishes. The birth of a child was welcomed as leading to higher personal, social, and economic status.

The underlying concepts which explain why the food and other injunctions, both pre-natal and post-partum, and the ritual behavior took their particular forms, are explained.

The human body, harboring multiple immaterial souls, was seen as composed of earth, fire, water, and wind. Illness was caused by intrusive disruption of these four elements, or by soul loss. Food and medicines had properties which could be used to restore balance in the elements. The traditional curers or exorcisers had magical and herbal remedies obtained ritually from a teacher. Since Buddhist phrasings, often read from old texts in weekly sermons, molded Bang Chan's conception of life, the ultimate cause of health or illness was the presence or absence of merit. This determined one's kam (karma), the balance sheet of virtuous actions which one added to, or reduced by sinning throughout successive existences over eons of time.

The Buddhist cosmic view of individuals as separate autonomous beings brought it about that help was the only dynamic relationship possible between people. The bonds established by helping people, on this earth, especially in the tasks of feeding priests, lasted on into successive incarnations. Thus, meritorious people met again and might marry again. Families had continuity over time, and babies were born into the "right"

779 family. Babies lacking in merit died at their birth, just as mothers whose merit had run low suffered or died in childbirth.

84 A soul desiring rebirth flew into the womb of a woman at
[775] conception. By care and imitative magical practices, both
parents helped the fetus grow but the mother gave the baby its
[774] body. Parturition was a joint effort of mother and child, the
[789] course and outcome of which was determined by their respective stores of merit. After delivery the child was blessed, his soul seized and tied in, and ritual means taken that he not
846 wander from home throughout life. A post-partum rest of
392 several days was taken beside a hot fire, the purpose of which was both physiological, i.e. to dry the uterus, and ritual, to bring about full "ripe" adulthood.

The fire, which was consecrated, strengthened a woman and made her a better nourisher, mature, more compassionate, and eligible to handle magic and the tender souls of living creatures. Thus she was fitted for her life-calling as a woman.
793 The comparable ceremony of maturation for men, when they too
789 were changed from "raw" to mature, compassionate, and strong
562 males for their calling of fatherhood and leadership, was ordination into the Buddhist priesthood. Only those men and women who had undergone their respective rites of maturation were eligible to handle magic. Men's magic gave power, control and could be aggressive. Women's magic was limited to
[688] nurturing purposes, and could never be destructive. The respective areas of magical competence and right were autonomous and rigidly separated on pain of severe sanctions.

844 This view of the role of women in life and the events of childbirth in the earthly and cosmic scene, had the effect of giving women in childbirth a positive, secure, and relaxed outlook, and an understanding and acceptance of suffering so that they had little fear.

[128] How careers in midwifery, whether professional or amateur were established, and the nature of the specialty and of a practice are discussed.

128 The understanding of, and the attitudes toward, modern
844 medicine are given along with findings accounting for
846 acceptance or rejection of modern hospital care for parturients. Accepting the changes that were observed in the practices
369 surrounding childbirth proved to be a means of expressing
178 partial withdrawal from the old life of a farmer and a step towards the glitter of urban ways. In the desire to be seen as progressive, the fire rest had been shortened, market products substituted for the consecrated fire, and other urban ways introduced.

000 For persons interested in introducing changes in the

597 Adoption was fairly common, though not always of lasting satisfaction. On the other hand, in this watery domain, the 842 trouble (lamhāk) in raising children, mostly involving 855 ceaseless tending, was such that a childless woman was accorded a little surface envy as one who had missed or avoided a lot of trouble. The attitude towards twins was 845 ambivalent. "Twins are unlucky because there are more mouths to feed, more labour, trouble, and not enough milk. With twins, a poor family will never rise again." "No one will marry a twin for fear of begetting twins." "If twins are of a different sex, one must die." Yet others considered twins lucky "because they could be nursed at the same time, and given the same things."

855 Wealth differences also affected these attitudes, 842 especially if babies came in close succession. Comments 184 heard were: "Why do poor people have more children than the rich?" "Many visitors come bringing gifts to a rich parturient because she is respected. No one likes to talk to a poor person." "Those who have a baby oftener than every 3 years will never be rich. Fortunately, 4 of my 7 children died." The increasing cost of raising children was a concern. In one of the few families that had plans for their children's education, the father underwent a vasectomy after his 9 fine children were born, because he "feared he would not be able to feed them all." His wife, reassured that the operation had not "hurt" her husband, "was glad he had done so."

847 Abortifacients and Contraceptives

Episodes concerning abortifacients were whispered about [779] both Muslims and Buddhists. A Buddhist who induced abortion was seen as impeding an individual's rebirth and disobeying a religious prohibition on taking life, tenets which did not obtain among the Muslims. Abortifacient medicines to be used with abdomen-pressing were quietly sold by Muslims.[6] "Unmarried Muslim girls use them mostly," reported one Buddhist, "and they almost die in the process." A Buddhist curer had similar expensive medicine, but "unlike the Muslims, he will 842 not destroy the baby." Chinese boat-vendors also carried contraceptive medicines (ya) which were secretly discussed by wives. A husband reported his wife as saying, "Old ways

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6. Fraser (193) reports that in the Muslim village of Rusembilan, abortions were openly practiced, (as if part of a Muslim cultural heritage).

Chapter III

PREGNANCY AND PARTURITION

Conception

Conception occurred when a khwan-soul flew into the womb of a woman during sexual intercourse. "A father and a mother are equally important because there is no birth in the world without both. An infant is the product of both sexes," said a priest in a Bang Chan sermon.[21]

The little being in the womb from the moment of conception was a specific individual who had lived many times before, meritful or sinful according to its previous actions. Desire for rebirth was in itself evidence of inadequate merit to effect release from incarnation. Though this life was to some extent a fresh start, his character (niasi) and heart (cha.i) were already largely formed through his store of merit and ingrained habit from former existences.[22]

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21. The teachings of the Buddha state: "Rebirth takes place when a father and a mother come together, and it is the mother's period, and the one to be born is present" (Suriyabongse:20).

22. He bore with him the last ideas spoken to him at his most recent death. The Visuddhi-Magga tells how this carry-over occurs. One of the categories of karma, was the "close at hand, karma remembered at the point of death [which] springs up with [a person] in rebirth" (Warren:246). As King Mongkut lay dying, everyone in the room called out "arahat!" in his ear incessantly so that by "remembering it at the point of death" he might be reborn an arahat (E.R.E. "Siam": 487). Another pertinent category of karma was the "habitual": "karma that has become habitual through frequent repetition. This brings on rebirth when [other] forms are absent" (Warren:246). Here is the basis for the inborn character, heart and ingrained habit (cf. J.R. Hanks, 1959, and the section below on "Habit" (khoei).

759 the slight differences in ministrations. "The Muslim mid-
795 wife massages more than the Buddhist." The women easily
844 entered into reciprocal courtesies. The Muslim woman knew
57 the steps in the Buddhist winnowing ceremony and performed
852 them as desired. One Buddhist mother dispensed, however, with the winnowing "because the midwife was Muslim." A Buddhist woman made up the khwan khăo in the fashion specified by the Muslim midwife and participated in the latter's teacher-rite.

795 Certain fundamental ideas of the Muslims led to rein-
779 terpretations of familiar Buddhist terms and activities.
774 "Khwan" referred to the soul, but with no implication of reincarnation. "Bun," meaning "merit" to the Buddhist, meant charitable giving in the sense of tithes, for Islam
782 prescribed that a portion of one's income be given to the
177 poor. On the other hand, the Muslims had taken over many Buddhist practices: for one, the acceptance of Buddhist holy water as a cure for spirit attack.

795 Completely Muslim was the stress on physical and
783 moral purification as an objective of every rite, and
304 conversely, the prevalence of the idea of defilement.
764 "Circumcision is to cleanse the body before growing up," it was said. Muslim mortuary rites were elaborate procedures for purification. When a Muslim baby died, the Buddhist midwife said, "The body was cleaned before
831 burial," implying thorough measures beyond his ordinary experience. Procreation was viewed as dangerous and
834 contaminating. The behavior that hid sexual phenomena at the same time by constant prescriptions kept sexuality
562 much more in mind. Muslims separated males from females, for example, at feasts. No Muslim male ever became a midwife.

795 The events surrounding childbirth illustrated the
843 differing viewpoints between Muslim and Buddhist. In the
844 seventh month of her pregnancy, a Muslim woman called on on her chosen midwife, and gave her a gift of betel pepper leaves and areca nut to assure her services (fàk
273 thong: to deposit gold). On returning home, she went as fast as possible "to insure fast delivery." Since Muslims frowned on liquor, their medicines were made up of hot-tasting spices in hot water. Yet one Muslim mid-
795 wife prescribed large doses of liquor before and during
844 parturition. For labor and delivery, a Muslim was stricter about utilizing the privacy of the small enclosed room, if there were one, while in the Buddhist house-
562 hold "it could be anywhere" in the house. Muslim men, except for husband, brother, or father, were excluded from the scene. The Muslim khwan khăo contained "7

fishing and selling vegetables, they managed to obtain a fair diet. The father's skill as a masseur was valued especially at periods of heavy farm work, after childbirth, and by the cooks at a ceremonial feast. This brought in from 2 to 12 baht per week.

In Group A, Families 67 and 103 were at the most difficult period of life, with young, dependent children, and housing, land and equipment to be acquired. By great industry, including egg production from a flock of 60 chickens, and by severe "belt-tightening," Household 103 was lifting itself into a propertied position. The parents in Household 67 were shy. One or the other of the two older children often stayed home from school to look after the baby, so that both parents could work. Husband and wife in Household 12 were both very shy, the only ones in the survey group who were at all reluctant to participate. They seemed ashamed of limited food. The wife was frequently ill. In Household 222, the 14-year old daughter often gathered and sold vegetables at Minburi before school in the morning. She might have full charge of the younger children for days at a time. A daughter who worked as a servant in Bangkok contributed 50 baht per month to this household. In Household 215, the activities of the wife as medium were predominant. Pay included food, often cooked, and the free use of 3½ rai of land, as well as cash. Maintenance of a son in school in Bangkok cost about 1000 baht per year plus 60 tang of rice. In Household 2, the elderly wife's services as "boss-buyer and cook" at ceremonials, and as marriage go-between did not bring in cash, but gifts, clothing and much participation in feasts.

All families in the survey group were Thai Buddhists, and 6 of them offered food to priests more or less regularly. On 17 of the 24 survey days when the observer visited these households, food was offered. Two of the 5 families that did not customarily give food to priests, did so on one and two survey days, respectively. In one case food was offered to a son who had been recently ordained. Rice was always included in the food offered, and in 3 of the 20 instances observed rice only was given. The weight of cooked rice given by one family in one day ranged from 185 to 1210 grams, with an average of about 600 grams. In 16 instances, some cooked food such as fish or vegetable curry was given with the rice; in one instance fresh pineapple was given.

Cash Expenditures for Food. - Mean total, and per capita daily cash expenditures for food for survey days, are shown, by household in Table 3. (See Table 2, p. 23 for division of food expenditures for Groups A,B) Although cash expenditures for food varied considerably, the amounts in all cases were small, and approximated figures obtained by Janlekha (1955) for 106 households. Larger consumption of animal products, which were the most expensive items purchased,

4:Phillips E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1966
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593 155 #156 [125] None of the above is meant to imply that 79 percent of the adults of Bang Chan would in fact give away their children. But the relatively high frequency of agreement they exhibited in admitting to such a possibility and the fact that as many as 65 percent agreed that it was either good or justifiable reveals something of the psychological environment within which the Bang Chan child is reared and where he learns his basic orientations toward other persons. The responses to this single stimulus must of course be seen in the context of the more naturalistic, behavioral materials presented earlier. The point of all these illustrations, however, is that they indicate there is nothing sacrosanct about any human tie in Bang Chan, even that which exists between parent and child. If necessity or personal predilection requires, then this tie too may be broken. What is perhaps most significant here, from a developmental point of view, is that the breaking of the tie always exists as a realistic potentiality in the life of the child. Reared in an environment where he learns that no human tie need be permanent or sustaining, the developing child inevitably takes on some of these same patterns of expectation in his own dealings with others. Thus the villager who abandons his spouse or the employee who with little warning leaves his employer are acting in terms of patterns the prototypes of which they either actually experienced as children or came to expect as part of the realities of interpersonal relations in Bang Chan.

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• 779 #156 The second major source of the villagers' loose relationships lacks the developmental reference of the above. To a certain extent it is not even social relational in nature, although our concern with it stems from its having crucial consequences to the social orientations of individuals. I am referring here to the Buddhist emphasis on the primacy of individual action and individual responsibility. Without going into a lengthy discussion of the subtleties of Buddhist doctrine, it is imperative to point out that the principal tenet of Hinayana Buddhism is the complete psychological freedom, isolation, and responsibility of every person. This is not the Occidental idea of "free will," but rather the notion that every person is a free agent, responsible only to and for himself, and that he inevitably reaps the fruits of his own conduct. Buddhist canonical literature is replete with references stressing the centrality of this doctrine. The last words of the Lord Buddha before he left this world to achieve the sublime state of *nibphaan* (nirvana) are said to have been: "Work out your own salvation with diligence." A frequently quoted passage of the *Dhamapada* reads: "By oneself is evil done; By oneself one suffers; By oneself evil is left undone; By oneself one is purified." The whole complex cosmology relating to the accumulation of merit and demerit is phrased in terms of the individual's lonely journey through cycles of interminable existences working out his own moral destiny. Who his progenitors were, what kind of environment he was born

4:Phillips E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1966
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and reared in, what social advantages or disadvantages he was exposed to, are considered all secondary, and in some cases even insignificant, in influencing what he is and what he does. The life and career of Gautama himself is perfect testament to the essential irrelevance of these factors. (On the other hand, the attention given to these considerations in Western ontology is a perfect expression of our "sociological bias." In our system, even our original moral state is determined by what someone else—Adam and Eve—did.) In Therevada Buddhism, an individual's worldly and cosmological condition—the former essentially a temporary, special case of the latter—is for the most part self-generative, although because one never knows *when* the effects of one's *kam* may emerge it is also unpredictable.

These formulations translate and function on the level of workaday behavior in an extremely subtle manner. Every time a Bang Chaner is about to do something he does not ask himself whether it is in his own best moral interest. Similarly, every time he ignores another's expectations about how he will behave he does not justify his actions in terms of the Buddhist doctrine of enlightened self-interest. However, these formulations do impart a fundamental legitimacy to the pursuit of individualistic self-concern. More important, they establish—in a diffuse, unreflective, but nonetheless highly meaningful way—a definition of social reality that assumes the ultimate reference of every person's act is himself. In these terms, social relationships become defined as either artifacts of, or media for, the attainment of one's own ends. People need and use each other to satisfy their own purposes. (This is not to say that social relationships do not have many other functions. Our concern here is with the way *villagers* view the aims of their social relations.) What keeps the social system running relatively smoothly is the assumption that every person is acting on precisely the same bases, and the realization that one's own purposes are best served by acts of reciprocation. The basis of the system, however, is the continuous satisfaction of each participant's individual needs, for should such satisfactions not be forthcoming, there is always complete freedom and sanction to withdraw. Villagers typically define benefits gained from reciprocal acts to be materialistic (the food or gifts a parent gives a child or an employer gives an employee); psychological (the respect a subordinate awards to a superordinate or the security the latter provides the former); and spiritual (the merit parents gain when their son enters the monkhood, the merit being repayment for their having gone to the trouble of rearing him).

Translated into theoretical terms, Buddhist doctrine functions here in two ways. First, it represents a codification of certain *assumptions* about the nature of human responsibilities, an articulation of what Wallace (1961*b*: 94) calls "primitive predicates," or the frames of reference that provide the

4:Phillips E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1966
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primitive categories into which people code their experience. From a psychodynamic point of view, the predicates do not *require* codification; people think and act in terms of "primitive" (tacit, axiomatic) categories many of which are never explicated in the propositions of their formal religious, ethnophilosophical, or mythological systems. Why certain categories are selected for codification and others are not is beyond the scope of this book. However, it is clear that a major function of Buddhist thought—like that of any articulate symbolic or ideological system—is to *objectify* and *clarify* some of the more important experiential assumptions of its adherents. This is the cognitive essence of all belief systems. As a belief system, Buddhist doctrine also takes on a special value of its own. This is in fact its second major function; that is, the tenets of Buddhism not only serve to objectify through philosophical elaboration that which is already accepted but also to act as standards in assessing the value, propriety, and significance of human actions. In this sense, Buddhism (again like any coherent ideological system) provides a corpus of knowledge for rationalizing and *sanctioning* certain types of behavior and for disapproving of others. The very belief system that codifies aspects of reality for its adherents assumes the normative function of reinforcing and promoting those activities that are in conformity with it. This is the motivational essence of all belief systems. Needless to say, we are speaking here of activities that are subjectively felt to be valuable and proper, irrespective of the social psychological dysfunctions that may follow from them. Thus, returning to our major theme, most villagers would agree that the Bang Chaner who without saying a word leaves his spouse in order to avoid an embarrassing or rancorous confrontation over some difficulty is behaving in a manner thoroughly consonant with "doing evil by himself; suffering by himself; leaving evil undone by himself; and becoming purified by himself." How the wife responds to his actions is her problem. Her *kam* may well have been the reason for this happening to her. (Note that I say ". . . for this happening to her," *not* ". . . for his doing this to her." This is the typical village way of perceiving such events. Again, the interactional dimension is secondary: it is what happens *to* individuals, not what happens *between* them, that counts.) How *explicitly* villagers would apply Buddhist doctrine to this particular situation is problematic. Applications of Buddhist thought usually emerge only after villagers have been asked to think actively about and articulate justifications for the actions of people. Their comments are typically *post hoc* explanations that appear only when there is a necessity either to understand or ethically evaluate an individual's actions.

The above discussion was concerned with detailing some of the sources and supports of the loosely structured relationships that are found in Bang